



STORY BY RANDY ROUGHTON

# DOUBLE DUTY:

## THE EXPERIENCE OF ONE FAMILY WHEN BOTH PARENTS DEPLOY

**E**very Air Force spouse knows the feeling of having to fulfill multiple roles when the husband or wife deploys. Tech. Sgt. Christina Gamez has been there several times during her husband's deployments. But now the financial analyst is learning a different level of double-duty responsibilities in a dual, active-duty family as she prepares to follow her husband for her own deployment in early 2011.

Sergeant Gamez will soon leave for combat skills training at Camp Bullis near San Antonio, Texas before she begins her 365-day deployment. Her husband, Master Sgt. Rodolfo Gamez, a member of the Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Agency at Lackland Air Force Base, is already in Afghanistan.

The Gamez's are writing a blog during their dual deployments to help prepare other Airmen couples for the double duty they will face if they deploy at the same time. She hopes her "Double Duty" blog will help fellow Airmen to "make those hard choices and follow through on their preparations — to know before they go, making sure

their families and homes are properly cared for while they fulfill their responsibilities during deployment."

"When Airmen deploy, there are so many things left to take care of," Sergeant Gamez wrote in her first blog as she prepared for her deployment, "and the day-to-day stuff is just a small part of it.

"It's the pneumonia that pops up and the brakes going out, or if you're like me and on active-duty yourself, you could get picked up for a special duty assignment and have to pack up your home and get it on the market while he's still gone . . . It's really about being prepared, saving some of the stress and having some kind of positive control.

"For the moms and dads who stay back, maybe some can learn from my lessons, others will understand that their feelings are completely normal. For me it's definitely therapy for what will be one of the hardest years in our lives with both of us being away from the kids.

"For those who are about to deploy, maybe it can help them to understand what to expect if they haven't deployed before. I have the opportunity to view this process from both sides and

help others while helping myself in the process, that's a good feeling."

The first entry in the blog, entitled "From One YA YA to Another," is now available at <http://doubleduty.dodlive.mil/2010/08/18/10/#more-10>.

In her blog, Sergeant Gamez plans to share how her family prepares before deploying and how they cope with separation from each other, as well as their two children — 4-year-old Tomas and 3-year-old Eva. The children have become accustomed to their father being away for work, with two of his six deployments occurring during their young lives. But this time will be different, with both mother and father facing deployments simultaneously.

Her parents planned to take the children when Sergeant Gamez followed her husband to Afghanistan. Tomas, who is scheduled to begin kindergarten next fall, still has the soldier doll with his father's face and recorded messages from his previous Operation Iraqi Freedom deployment. His parents are also keeping a journal for their children to read.

They've also established "goal dates" to give the children days they can mark off the calendar to work toward various rewards. They've seen their trip to Walt Disney World come through; they've seen their dad come back from training and they realize that all those "X's" lead to something.

They are excited about gardening at Grandma and Grandpa's house and picking up where they left off here, and probably most importantly have been practicing Skyping. They

know that it is not perfect and while they may not get to talk everyday, they will get to talk to mommy and daddy as often as possible.

Air Force deployment checklists stress preparing a will and power of attorney, online access to bank and credit card accounts with passwords and pin numbers, and plans for automatic bill payments, along with a family care plan.

Once the couple learned Master Sgt. Gamez was set to deploy again, she had her chief call to find out where she sat in the "rack and stack."

She learned the Air Force Personnel Center already knew her name and she was on the short list. AFPC told her she would more than likely be tasked within two to three months, and that there were several more deployment slots coming down the pipeline. It was at that point the couple decided to take positive control of the situation.

They decided she would volunteer for her own 365-day deployment to lessen the impact on the family, especially the children. They believe their experience shows the importance of Air Force families knowing where they stand in the deployment cycle. The 365-day non-volunteer deployment schedule is based on the Airman's short-tour return date.

Time may move slowly as the couple is separated from the children until their father returns in October 2011, followed by their mother in February 2012. But they're confident their preparation will ensure the best possible situation for their family while their parents are away and upon their return.

### Tech. Sgt.

Christina Gamez gives her husband, Master Sgt. Rodolfo Gamez, an emotional send-off with their children at the San Antonio International Airport before he departs for Afghanistan.

Courtesy photo

